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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of a community college district-wide reading program designed to foster reading by faculty, students, administrators, and staff. The Reading/Writing across the Curriculum Committee of the Metropolitan Community Colleges selected Kurt Vonnegut's novel "Galapagos," a novel which met criteria as to length, literary merit, broad appeal, application to various disciplines, etc. Subcommittees representing staff, faculty, administration, and students took the responsibility for publicity/promotion, student activities, discussion groups, contacting the author, resource guides for faculty, activities/contests, and culminating events. In the days following the culminating activity, a survey was distributed to staff, faculty, and students. A total of 286 replies were received, 227 of them from students and the remainder from college staff, faculty, and administrators. Results indicated that most of the campus body knew of the project, and that 45% actually participated in reading the novel. (Twenty references and the survey form are attached.) (RS)

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Galapagos and a Community of Readers

Many community college students need guidance from their content teachers in order to handle the reading demands made of them. But convincing some colleagues, who have little time, training, or inclination to incorporate reading instruction into their crowded syllabi is another matter. They may view reading, alone of the three R's, as a skill which should have been mastered before entering college and reading instruction at the college level as inappropriate beyond remedial efforts (Chaplin, 1978).

Teachers use reading as a major source of learning by assigning textbooks, articles, and library research, yet some students manage to "get by" in their courses reading little or nothing beyond their assignments, if that. Some instructors, frustrated in their efforts to get students to read, may resort to telling them what they need to know. In fact, Rieck (1977) has found teachers who inadvertently sabotage reading.

> Out loud teachers said, "I require reading in this course. All students are to read the assignments. Students are to read X number of pages from the textbook." However, their nonverbal attitude said to the students: "You really don't have to read the assignments because you aren't tested on them and probably won't have to discuss them. You should read X number of pages, but there is no real reason to do so. Reading really isn't important. Outside reading is of little value in this class. My

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students will have no way to tell whether or not I like to read" (p. 647).

In the last several decades reading personnel, aware of the importance of integrated as opposed to isolated learning, have attempted to infiltrate content classrooms with reading strategies (Moore, Readence, & Rickelman, 1983; Singer, 1983), with varying degrees of success in secondary and postsecondary systems. Preservice courses have positively changed secondary teacher attitudes and feelings of competency (Welle, 1981; Christiansen, 1986), but community college faculty have not generally had these as part of their training. Inservice programs of long-range duration usually involving graduate credit have enjoyed some success (Dupois, Askow, and Lee, 1979; Pavlik, 1978; Stieglitz, 1983). At the community college level, graduate credit is not as attractive an incentive. A Chicago community college system provides release time for faculty interested in participating in "critical literacy" efforts (Oakton Community College: Reading, Writing, and Thinking Across the Curriculum, 1989). Some systems provide a reading-writing consultant to work with faculty over a period of time (Stanfill, 1978). Although these projects take time to implement, their effects seem more lasting than one-shot inservice days.

Trelease (1979) tells us that our public educational institutions do a good job of teaching students how to read but not to want to read. Interest in reading relates positively to college success

(Maxwell, 1965). Success of two-year students who transfer to four-year institutions relates highly to the library circulation at the junior college (Hammes, 1969). Interdisciplinary involvement with literature has shown increased use of library and resource personnel (Criscuolo, 1976). In addition to stimulating interest in reading in the field, there are indications that independent reading aids comprehension (Shnayer, 1969; Estes and Vaughan, 1973).

Smylie (1988) found that teacher perceptions of their own ability to teach and their interpersonal relationships were key factors in changing teacher behavior and attitude. So using content-relevant material and fostering faculty communication would seem to raise faculty consciousness about a reading climate. If an individual acquires reading in "much the same way as he catches a cold--by being effectively exposed to someone who already has it" (Johnson, 19??), then supporting faculty efforts to model reading should be a prominent feature of any reading-across-the-curriculum effort. Furthermore, promoting the social purposes of reading may help to dispel some of the dull, antisocial view of reading that may remain from our students' teenage years (Gentile and McMillan, 1977).

With these considerations in mind, the Reading/Writing Across the Curriculum committee of the Metropolitan Community Colleges supported a district-wide reading project to foster reading by faculty, students, administrators, and staff at its three main campuses and their branches. We hoped to advance the following beliefs and

goals: (1) Reading improvement is a district commitment. (2) Reading beyond textbook assignments as a source of learning has value and stimulates individuals to read for pleasure. (3) Instructors, by modeling overtly the value they themselves place on reading and by initiating outside reading lists of their own, foster lifelong reading in their students. (4) The social purposes of reading can help build a feeling of community among teachers, administrators, staff, and students of varying backgrounds, ages, and interests by sharing a common academic experience. (5) Reading specialists, using a single vehicle and benefiting from increased visibility, can develop activities which help faculty from various disciplines teach students how to handle text.

It was hoped that a project of this sort would stimulate outside reading and that students, staff, and faculty would enjoy a shared campus-wide experience of an academic nature.

METHOD

After seeking recommendations from faculty and students, the Reading/Writing Across the Curriculum Committee under the direction met to select a book. These were the criteria used: application to various disciplines, affordability, length, substantive content that would lend itself to discussion, literary merit, broad appeal, and, preferably, written by a living author. A narrowed selection list was offered to faculty for further comments. "Advocates" of indi-

vidual novels made brief presentations leading to a decision favoring Galapagos by Kurt Vonnegut.

In an initial survey 85 full-time and 11 part-time faculty indicated interest in participating on some level, so the project was launched. Subcommittees representing staff, faculty, administration, and students took the responsibility for publicity/promotion, student activities, discussion groups, contacting the author, resource guides for faculty, activities/contests, and culminating events.

Turtles (the computer could not make tortoises) appeared on walls of campus buildings at the end of fall semester anticipating the coming project. The district sponsored contests for a logo, creative writing, music, and art. The Student Activities organization held a beach party with a Galapagos theme and trivia contests to publicize the event and promote interest during the day. For the evening population, copies of the novel were given to every 20th person present. Discussion groups were held for both faculty/staff/administrators and students. Slide scenes of Galapagos accompanied an oral reading of selections from the novel. Some classes viewed a film of Vonnegut discussing his past training in science and the influence of early radio comedians. Student newspapers were quite supportive of the project but lambasted the novel, and demanded, with good reason, for more student participation in the selection.

Faculty participation was voluntary. Reading and writing specialists worked with faculty to develop suggestions for incorporat-

ing the novel into their curricula. These included such topics as natural selection, the future of computers, social Darwinism, and world financial crises.

Kurt Vonnegut wrote a charming letter urging us to have fun with his book. Although he no longer makes public appearances, he agreed to a voice linkup. This became part of the culminating event held at our most central campus for students, faculty, and interested community members. Nick Lowry, a place kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs, Debra Holmes, a newscaster, former mayor Charles Wheeler, and Moderator Walt Bodine composed the panel who asked questions of the author. Members of the audience also submitted questions. Dancing, refreshments, and prizes followed.

In the days following the culminating activity a survey was distributed to staff, faculty, and students between classes in the campus center, the liberal arts building, and the science/technology building. They were collected immediately afterward. The student newspaper also became interested and surveyed all faculty and other students including two classes requiring the text. In one the instructor admitted disliking the book; in the other the instructor enjoyed it immensely.

RESULTS

Campus bookstores sold 1405 copies of Galapagos. In addition, one public bookstore in the area sold thirty copies more than the two or three they would ordinarily stock. Classroom participation

ranged from no mention of the book or project whatsoever to references in several science and engineering classes to required reading, the latter mainly in English, psychology, and philosophy. Several English classes viewed a film of Vonnegut discussing his past training in science and the influence early radio comedians had on his work.

Some art, writing, and music instructors made assignments related to the reading. Approximately 70 students, including some from these classes, entered the logo, creative writing, and songwriting contests. Approximately 300 students attended the Student Activities beach party at the Longview campus and over 200 at the Maple Woods. This activity was well-received, promoted interest, and gave students a chance to come together in a social setting and learn more about a book. The discussion groups were not as well attended, drawing from 6 to 12. One hundred-twenty attended the culminating event.

Reading and writing specialists gained more "visibility" with the guides they developed for faculty to consider in incorporating the novel into their curriculum. They also started a book exchange in the faculty-staff dining area as a spin-off event.

Results of the survey were as follows:

Of the 286 surveys received, 227 were from students, 29 staff, 16 faculty, and 11 administrators. Three did not report a status. 181 were day students, 34 evening, the rest did not indicate. 83% were aware of the project. 44.8 read all or part of the book.

61.5% reported that it had been mentioned or discussed in class. While only 30.4% enjoyed this novel, 41.1% enjoyed reading a book others had read, and 66.1% felt we should have a similar project next year with another book. Recommendations varied from self-help, motivational books to ones by Stephen King or another of Vonnegut's.

DISCUSSION

Institutions can effect changes. Not only did most of the campus body know about this project, but nearly 45% actually participating in reading the same novel. Community college students appreciate and seek opportunities for intellectual stimulation and enjoy being affiliated with their college's efforts to promote publicly and rally students for an academic event as well as traditional social or athletic ones. One student commented, "I'm so glad that the college is catching on to the fact that some of us read." One instructor in the adult PACE (interdisciplinary) program wants to use this novel again since it bridged several units and generated so much enthusiastic discussion.

A community college can stimulate an awareness for the value of reading materials other than textbooks and its relevance to classwork. The best resource for fostering this attitude appears to be the instructor through his/her personal example, time delegated, and direct suggestion. Quite a disparate group of instructors, staff, students, and administrators volunteered their time to foster this project. Evidently, teachers are not so jaded that they will

not promote outside reading, especially if they consider it relevant to their content areas.

We have learned much from this initial effort. For future projects we need to involve more students at the outset in text selection and in coordinating activities. Also publicity events should be scheduled earlier. While a three-campus project enjoys the benefits of larger-scale activities, the number of student, staff, and faculty participating in a culminating event located at one campus tends to suffer, and communication problems are magnified. Future research should highlight any changes in faculty attitude and behavior toward promoting outside reading.

SURVEY

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. The information will be used by the Reading Across the Curriculum committee to evaluate the Galapagos project.

1. Position ___Student (___Day ____Night ___PACE)
   ___Staff (___Full-time ___Part-time)
   ___Faculty: (___Full-time ____Part-time)
   (___Automotive ___Business ___Humanities
   ___Math ___Science ___Social Science)
   ___Administrator

2. I was aware of the Galapagos reading project? ____yes ___no
3. I read part or all of Galapagos. ____yes ___no
4. Galapagos was discussed or mentioned in some of my classes. ___yes ___no
   Which subjects?
5. I enjoyed reading Galapagos. ___yes ___no
6. I enjoyed reading a book that many others on campus had read. ____yes ___no
7. I attended (or plan to attend) or participated in (or plan to) some of the activities connected with the Galapagos project. ____yes ____no
8. We should have a campus-wide reading project again next year with another book.
   ____yes ____no
9. Which book(s) do you suggest? _____

Other comments _____

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